

**Jer. 8-9, Cycles of Sin, Judgment, and Mourning**  
**8:22-9:9 (MT 8:22-9:8): Social Sin**  
**September 9, 1989**  
**H. Van Dyke Parunak**

**A. Overview**

1. ch. 8-9 are built up from the causally related units of SIN, JUDGMENT, and MOURNING. The emphasis on mourning is what separates them from ch. 7,10.
2. Overall structure is an ABCBA chiasm.
  - a) 7 and 10 concentrate on *sacral* sin, introducing its consequences.
  - b) The consequences and resulting mourning come more into focus in 8 and 9b.
  - c) 9a looks at the *social* sin that emerges.
3. The emphasis in this section is thus on social sin; in particular, deception. The overall structure shows that it emerges from sacral sin.

**Application:** There can be no true morality apart from the Lord. When a nation departs from God, denies him, and does not teach its children about him, moral decay is the inevitable outcome. Bush's drug war is only addressing the symptom, which will never go away unless the nation turns to God.

4. Detailed structure:
  - a) Note IF at 9:7, dividing it into two parts.
  - b) First part, 8:22-9:6, is unified by three desires. The first two, on the lips of Jeremiah, express mourning, while the last, by the Lord, sets forth the people's sin.
  - c) Second part, 9:7-9, is chiastic, ABA: outer members warn interrogatively of judgment, while the center again focuses on their sin.
  - d) Thus the two parts are {Mourning + Sin} and {Sin + Judgment}. All three components are here, but not in linear order as they were in 8:4-21.

**B. 22-2, MOURNING + SIN**

A sequence of three questions. The first two lament the doom of Judah. Note the progression: First, Jer. would seek to heal them. When that proves impossible, he asks to weep for them. But then, the Lord introduces a third question, which shifts from mourning to sin: seeing how corrupt they are, it is more appropriate to escape from them.

1. 8:22-9:1, Mourning Questions.

a) 8:22, What can heal my people?

- 1) Balm: the resinous sap of a particular tree, used as a medicine. Cf. the use of pine oil as a disinfectant.

- 2) "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Gilead was famous for the balm that it produced; presumably, it would also have abounded in physicians, at least those capable of applying the resin effectively. Furthermore, Gilead was close to Judah. There would be no excuse for someone in Judah not to avail themselves of this remedy.
- 3) "Why ... not recovered?" Judah suffers under a spiritual wound. The best possible cure is right at hand--God's salvation by grace to those who confess their sin and beg his mercy. Our balm is the blood of Christ; himself, our great physician, and "the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth," Ps. 145:18. How tragic for anyone to perish apart from Christ, when salvation is so near. How tragic for Judah to go into captivity, when salvation could have been had so easily!

b) 9:1, How can I weep for them?

But since they do reject the balm that is so near, he does not have tears enough to express fully his grief for them. He wishes that his head were a reservoir full of water, so that he could weep without pause.

**Application:** Again, we marvel at his sympathetic, loving attitude. Instead of proudly boasting of his righteousness in the face of their sin, he mourns for their justly deserved fate. There is no sense of pride here, "God chose me and rejected you.

May the Lord cultivate in us the heart of Jeremiah toward the lost.

2. 9:2-6, Sin Question: Where can I escape from them?

Three things show that this is spoken by the Lord, rather than Jeremiah.

- a) "my people" is always on the lips of the Lord, never Jeremiah, who uses "the daughter, 'My People'" (cf. Hosea 2:1).
- b) Syntactic continuity with 9:3
- c) Cf. 14:8

The section is a double reason paragraph, first setting forth the Lord's desire to escape from his people, then his advice to all hearers to do the same. We have two panels, each with four parts: call for action, then reason emphasizing treachery, deception, and no knowledge of the Lord.

a) 9:2-3, The Lord desires to abandon his people because of their sin.

1) 2a, The call for action. Their sin is so appalling to him that he must withdraw from them.

a> Cf. Prov. 21:9, better a corner of a housetop than a broad house and a brawling woman. The Lord's wife, Judah, is so perverse that he seeks out his "corner of a

housetop."

b> **Application:** The Holiness of God. Evil cannot abide in his presence. He will either abandon it (as here; cf. withdrawal from Samson) or destroy it in judgment.

2) 2b-3, Reason: three successively more general and fundamental failings.

a> 2b: Treachery, violation of covenant commitments to other parties.

1> "Adulterers" focuses not only on their marital infidelity toward one another, but also their spiritual adultery toward the Lord.

2> "Treachorous men" is from a root that describes violation of covenant. "Assembly" is not just any meeting, but specifically a religious gathering, so the notion is that even as they gather together for their great feasts and sacrifices, they are violating the very covenant that gives meaning to those assemblies.

b> 3a: Deceit. Now we generalize one step from treachery. Treachery is a special kind of deceit: deceit in the realm of promises made to others. But deceit in general is much broader, including any misrepresentation of the truth. No one can believe anything that they say. Note that this places us squarely in the "second table" of the law: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." "The Lord hates ... a lying tongue."

1> "They bend their tongues"--Compares the tongue to a warrior's bow; theirs shoots out deception.

2> "Not valiant for the truth"--Again, military language. They are in the army of falsehood, and thus are not warriors for the truth.

3> **Application:** God's word is truth. It conforms to reality. In fact, it is so much truth that it FORMS reality. The creative action of God's Word in Gen. 1 (cf. Isa. 55:11) is the ultimate in truth; a word so true that whatever does not align with it, must change. Our call is to be like God, to be godly, to offer him the worship of imitation ("the sincerest form of flattery"). Thus speaking a lie is fundamentally incompatible with the nature of God. Our word should be our bond. When circumstances make it difficult to keep our word, we should remember the creative power of God's word, and exert every effort to bring to pass that which we have spoken. He who would abide in the Lord's tabernacle "swears to his

own hurt, and does not change" (Ps. 15:4).

c> 3b: not knowing the Lord. This is the fundamental, underlying problem. Deception as well as every other sort of practical sin stems finally from alienation from God, which leaves people to "proceed from evil to evil" without any hope.

b) 9:4-6, The Lord warns the people to be on guard because of the nation's sin. (Cf. Jeremiah's later experiences at the hand of this population.--need to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves) The reason covers the same three successively more general topics as in the previous verses: treachery, deceit, and godlessness.

1) 4a, The call for action. Watch out for your neighbors; don't trust your brothers. General warning to the population not to trust one another, even the closest relations. If even almighty God must run away into the wilderness, how much more must mere mortals be on their guard!

**Application:** Christian, be on your guard. In the midst of your uprightness, don't be taken advantage of by those around you. Be "wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove."

2) 4b-6, Reason: Again, treachery, deceit, and not knowing the Lord.

a> 4b: Treachery. Note

1> Its extent: every brother, every neighbor.

2> Its character.

a: "Supplant:" the verb from which the name "Jacob" is derived. Recall how he exploited his brother's hunger to gain the birthright, and then fooled Isaac into giving him the blessing. This is how every brother behaves in the depraved state to which the culture has fallen. "Every brother will be an absolute Jacob."

b: "Walk with slanders": "Slander" is malicious speech about someone, and "walk with" indicates that they carry this gossip around. The society is marked with backbiting, gossip; no one can keep a confidence. No one is to be trusted.

b> 5-6a: Deceit. Again, this is the more general failing of which treachery is the specific case.

1> "Every man deceives his neighbor." The verb describes what Laban did to Jacob in changing his wages (Gen.

31:7), or what Samson did to Delilah in misleading her about the source of his strength (Judg. 16:10,13,15). There is a little flavor of mockery as well as deceit; we might say, "trifle with."

- 2> "taught their tongue." These are not momentary indiscretions, but a practiced way of life.
- 3> "weary themselves." Again, their sin is deliberate, not a lapse. They work hard at iniquity. Like the man who comes home from work at the end of the day, tired, "Boy, I had a hard day at the office." So these come home at the end of the day, "Boy, it sure was hard to sin today, but I managed"

**Application:** This puts the lie to the notion that sin is something that we can't help, or that we do it because it is easier than righteousness. That may be the case for inadvertent sin, but Judah is guilty of the sin of high hand, outright rebelliousness against the Lord.

- 4> "Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit." A direct warning to the prophet, personalizing 4a. (Should we consider this an inclusio with 4a?) Watch out; recognize the hazards among which you live.
- c> 6b: Fundamental evil: not knowing the Lord. Note the progression over v.3. There, it was simply stated as a fact that they do not know him. Now we see that this is a deliberate rejection of revelation: because of their deception, their desire to continue in this life style, they refuse to know him. Cf. Rom. 1:18, they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness," and thus merit God's wrath.

### C. 7-9, SIN + JUDGMENT

The lies described in the last section must lead to judgment. The Lord will not only flee from his people into the wilderness, but will bring judgment on them.

The section is chiastic: rhetorical questions about judgment in the outer members (9:7,9), then description of sin in the center (9:8).

1. 9:8. The central section reiterates the charge of deception that was the focus of the previous verses. We have a little scene here.
  - a) The tongue is described as a deadly, slaughtering arrow.
  - b) Its owner is planning an ambush ("in heart he layeth his wait," that is, he is imagining how he will set up this trap).
  - c) He deceptively speaks peace to his neighbor, making him think all is well, all the while taking advantage of his

friendship to advance himself at his neighbor's expense.

2. In the outer members (9:7,9) the Lord rhetorically asks whether he has any option other than judgment. (Of course, he does not.) Cf. the same sort of questions in 5:7,9,29. God is not only just, but absolutely fair; no one can question the appropriateness of his judgment.

a) 9:7. Only half of this one is question.

1) "melt and try." This is the same metaphor as in 6:27-30 (recall that "fortress" there is really "trier," assayer). Like one testing the genuineness and concentration of the ore for a precious metal, the Lord will melt them to test what they're really made of.

2) "How shall I do for the dtr...?" "for" is *mpny*, always with causal force. More idiomatically, "What [else] can I do in the face of this people?" Given their sin, what reasonable option is there other than to question their integrity, and thus put them to the test?

b) 9:9, cf. 5:9,29 It is inconceivable that God should not judge such a people.

1) Calls them a *goy*, usually reserved for gentiles! Given a nation that acts as Israel acts, that is, like rank pagans, what action would be appropriate on God's part, except to judge them?

2) Note particularly the locution, "should not my soul take vengeance?" Vengeance implies retaliation for an aggressive action. The use of the word to describe judgment reminds us that sin is an affront, an insult, an attack against God. He deserves our obedience, and when we do not offer it, we insult him and deny his authority over us. Thus his judgment is really vengeance.

D. Final hymn: Ps. 15, with emphasis on righteousness in speech.